Community Perception of Bias-Based Policing in Nashville, Tennessee
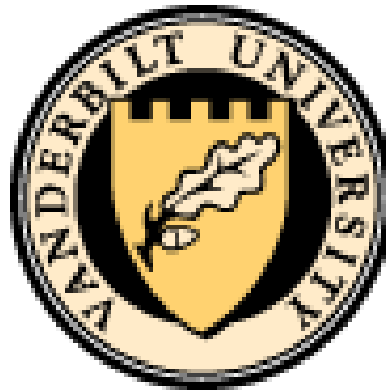
Prepared by Dr. Lorraine Williams Greene, Behavioral Health Services Division, Metropolitan Nashville Police Department; Dr. Paul Speer, Vanderbilt University

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The analysis of data gathered from the 16 focus group discussions among residents of Nashville, assisted in the formulation of questions, selection of residents and data collection methodology to conduct a survey to identify resident's perception of bias-based policing by Nashville officers, specific training issues, and other citizen concerns. This survey was designed to increase the Advisory Committee's understanding of the extent and nature of perceptions of bias by Metro police and any convergent or divergent patterns in the perceptions among residents of different races and those residing in areas where there are the highest number of traffic stops and citations vs. those residing throughout the entire city and county.

Methodology

The methodology was drawn from the recommendations of a research team: Sheila R. Peters, Ph.D., Fisk University; Paul Speer, Ph.D., and Brian Williams, Vanderbilt University; Captain Anthony Carter, Director of Training, Metropolitan Nashville Police Department (MNPD); Kennetha Sawyers, Manager of the Office of Professional Accountability, MNPD; Lt. James Stephens, Strategic Development, MNPD; and Lorraine W. Greene, Ph.D., Manager of Behavioral Health Services Division, MNPD, and Committee Chair.

The key individuals to be surveyed were residents of those areas in which there are the highest number of traffic stops and citations issued. Metropolitan Nashville Police Department began to collect traffic stop data in January 2001 and volunteered to participate in the State of Tennessee Traffic Stop Data Collection Program. Information is collected, but not limited to: the address of the stop; residency of the driver; citation issued; arrests resulting from the stop; searches conducted; written/verbal warnings and if the stop is a part of a crime reduction initiative. Monthly reports are available that lists the number of vehicle stops, citations and searches for each Sector and Detail. The Geographical Information System (GIS), was used placing a grid over the county to analyze the locations of vehicle stops, crime and police workload over the addresses of Black and White licensed drivers. Findings suggests that a disproportionate percentage of Black persons were stopped and that the vehicle stops occurred in high

crime inner-city neighborhoods with residents that are overwhelming African-American and where the highest concentration of officers are deployed.

The MNPD grant originally proposed conducting a survey among "various community groups throughout the city" with "special emphasis placed on areas with high minority and other ethnic communities." Sworn police personnel would administer the survey. However, with the detailed traffic stop data in hand, the evaluation team redesigned the research protocol and constructed a telephone survey to be randomly conducted among African-Americans residing in the areas with the highest number of vehicle stops <u>and</u> citations issued. In addition, a random sample of African-Americans and Whites residing in Nashville and Davidson County would also be surveyed as to their perception of racially bias-based policing and beliefs about Nashville police. Finally, police officers would not conduct the surveys and the university researchers would conduct the analysis.

The survey would include questions regarding their perception of Nashville Police Department and also information regarding:

- ❖ Number of interactions/encounters with police
- ❖ Reason of police encounters/interactions
- ❖ Following encounter their judgement about the department in regards to fairness, bias, and professionalism.
- ❖ Demographic information which included: age, gender, ethnicity, income, etc.

This information was important in determining if previous encounters/interactions with Nashville Police, education, and income had any influence on resident's perception of the police.

Participants

The sample in this study includes a total of 320 people. These 320 are divided into two groups: a simple random sample from throughout Nashville and a simple random sample of Blacks from high traffic-stop neighborhoods.

Nashville Participants

The Nashville sample is composed of 218 individuals selected randomly from throughout Nashville. This group includes Whites, Blacks, and individuals from other races and ethnicities. Of these 218, 152 are white, 36 Blacks and 30 either refused to identify their race or fell into a different racial category.

## Blacks from High Traffic-Stop Neighborhoods

The Black sample was randomly selected from the high traffic-stop neighborhoods within Nashville. Black households within those target areas were randomly selected. A total of 102 such households were included in the final sample.

ANALYSIS

For the basic analysis, 4 groups were compared:

- Whites randomly selected from throughout Nashville (N = 152);
- Blacks randomly selected from throughout Nashville (N = 36);
- 'Others' randomly selected from throughout Nashville (N = 30); and
- Blacks randomly selected from neighborhoods with high rates of traffic stops for Blacks within Nashville (N= 102).

Sampling of Blacks was broken down based on the map to the right. Two-thirds of the sample was drawn from the dark red shaded neighborhoods, and one-third drawn from the pink shaded areas.

Vehicle Stops
(Black)
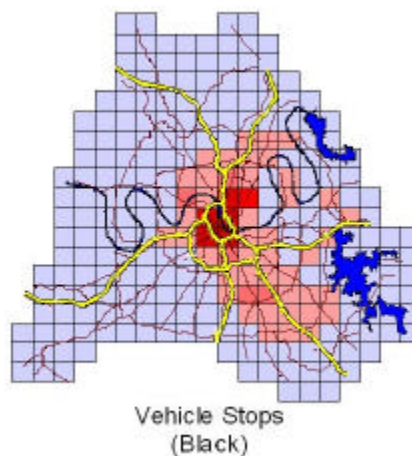
An Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was run for each of the key questions with education, income and frequency of police interaction used as covariates. These items were selected as covariates because they were hypothesized to have the potential to impact the results in significant ways.

FINDINGS

Overall, prior police encounters, education, and income did not alter participant's perceptions of Nashville Police and policing practices. Blacks and who resided in the targeted area and those who resided throughout the county did not differ in their perceptions of Nashville Police. Blacks believed that large proportions of traffic stops are unwarranted. They believed that police are biased against those residing in low income areas, and did perceive them as completely fair in their interactions with residents of any race or ethnicity.

Blacks and Whites differed significantly in their perceptions of Metro Police Department. Overall, Whites did not perceive the police as being biased against residents of public housing, and that persons of color should not feel too trusting of the police. Whites differed from Blacks and Others who believed that those who are not English speaking would be treated in a biased way. Whites believed that police "hassle whites as much as any other racial or ethnic group". (See Table 1)

TABLE 1 ANALYSIS RESULTS: ANOVA & ANCOVA

PERCEPTIONS OF POLICE AND POLICING	SIGN.	F ratio	Grp diff.	Covariate*
The police are extremely biased against residents of public housing.	yes	15.6	T, B > W	
The police are completely fair in their interactions with residents of any race or ethnicity.	yes	7.3	W, O > T, B	education
I have a great deal of trust in the Nashville police.	yes	7.8	W > T, B	
All the talk about racial profiling reduces the ability of police to do their jobs.	yes	3.3	W > T	education
A person of color can't feel too trusting of the Nashville Police.	yes	6.9	T, B > W	
If you don't speak English, the police are more likely to treat you in a biased way.	yes	3.5	T, B > W	
If you're poor, the police treat you with disrespect.	yes	8.9	T, B > W	
Police often humiliate people.	yes	8.1	T, B > W	
Nashville has better police than most cities in the U.S.	no			
A large proportion of police stops are unwarranted.	yes	16.3	T, B, O > W	income, education
We need police, but police that are doing their job "right."	no			
The police are just doing their job.	no	3.0	W > T	income, education
The police hassle 'whites' as much as any other racial or ethnic group.	yes	13.5	W > T, B	
The police get blamed for almost everything.	no			
Police stop more minorities because minorities commit most of the crimes.	no			
There is no preferential treatment for people based on race or ethnicity in Nashville.	yes	3.8	W > T, B	
Better training would reduce bias in police practices.	no			
The police treat rich people and poor people virtually the same.	yes	13.6	W, O > T, B	

W – White, random sample; B – Black, random sample; O – Other, random sample; T – Targeted Blacks from high traffic stop neighborhood
* any covariate listed, indicates a significant effect for the covariate. IF the covariate results in a different overall result, the group differences produced by the ANCOVA are typed in red.

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To further explore the relationships in these data, a factor analysis was conducted to reduce the number of questions in the survey generated from the original focus groups. A factor analysis 'clusters' similar questions into a single factor. This analysis produced four factors. The questions and the factors they represent are shown below:

PERCEPTIONS OF POLICE AND POLICING	Factor			
	1	2	3	4
The police are extremely biased against residents of public housing.	✔			
The police are completely fair in their interactions with residents of any race or ethnicity. [note: this item deleted as it loaded on multiple factors]				
I have a great deal of trust in the Nashville police.		✔		
All the talk about racial profiling reduces the ability of police to do their jobs.			✔	
A person of color can't feel too trusting of the Nashville Police.	✔			
If you don't speak English, the police are more likely to treat you in a biased way.	✔			
If you're poor, the police treat you with disrespect.	✔			
Police often humiliate people.	✔			
Nashville has better police than most cities in the U.S.				✔
A large proportion of police stops are unwarranted.	✔			
We need police, but police that are doing their job "right."				✔
The police are just doing their job.		✔		
The police hassle 'whites' as much as any other racial or ethnic group.			✔	
The police get blamed for almost everything.			✔	
Police stop more minorities because minorities commit most of the crimes.			✔	
There is no preferential treatment for people based on race or ethnicity in Nashville.			✔	
Better training would reduce bias in police practices.				✔
The police treat rich people and poor people virtually the same.		✔		

Factor 1: Police are biased. (six items)

Factor 2: Police are just 'doing a job'. (three items)

Factor 3: Police are 'fair and just'. (five items)

Factor 4: Support 'good' police. (three items)

Next, variables were calculated for each of the four factors above. Mean scores on each of the factors were generated and multivariate analysis of covariance was conducted to test for differences between the populations sampled in this study for each of these variables. Specifically, the analysis examined whether there were differences between the random sample of blacks, the random sample of whites, the random sample of 'other' races and the randomly selected blacks from the targeted area of Nashville with the highest levels of traffic stops. The analysis included covariates (variables other than racial group that might influence resident perceptions). In this model, age and income were covariates as both were significant factors influencing the four factor variables. In essence, the analysis asks whether there are differences in perceptions of police based on racial group – over and above any differences associated with age and income.

The analysis did result in significant differences between groups. The MANCOVA was significant [Wilks' Lambda = 4.85 (12, 823), p > .001], meaning there was an 'overall' difference between groups. Next, individual tests were conducted to explore whether there were differences between racial groups on each of the four factors analyzed (bias in police, just doing a job, 'fair and just' and support for 'good' policing). Significant differences were found for the first three factors.

In this graph, the blue lines represent average scores, and the orange bars represent the range of scores for 95% of a particular group.
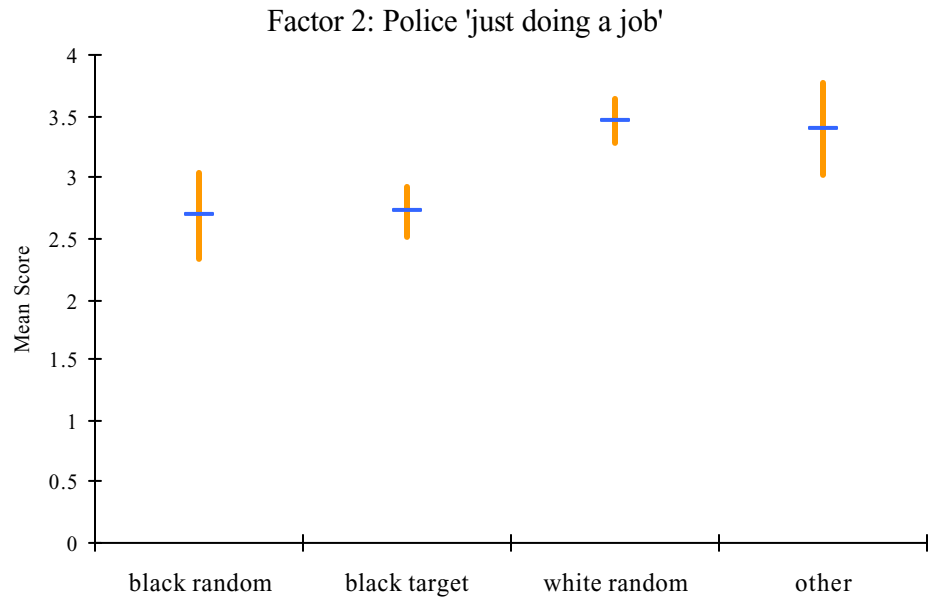
In the chart to the right, perceptions that police are biased differ dramatically across the four racial groups. Importantly, 95% of all persons in both black groups score higher on this perception regarding police bias than 95% of all white respondents.

Factor 1: Police are 'biased'
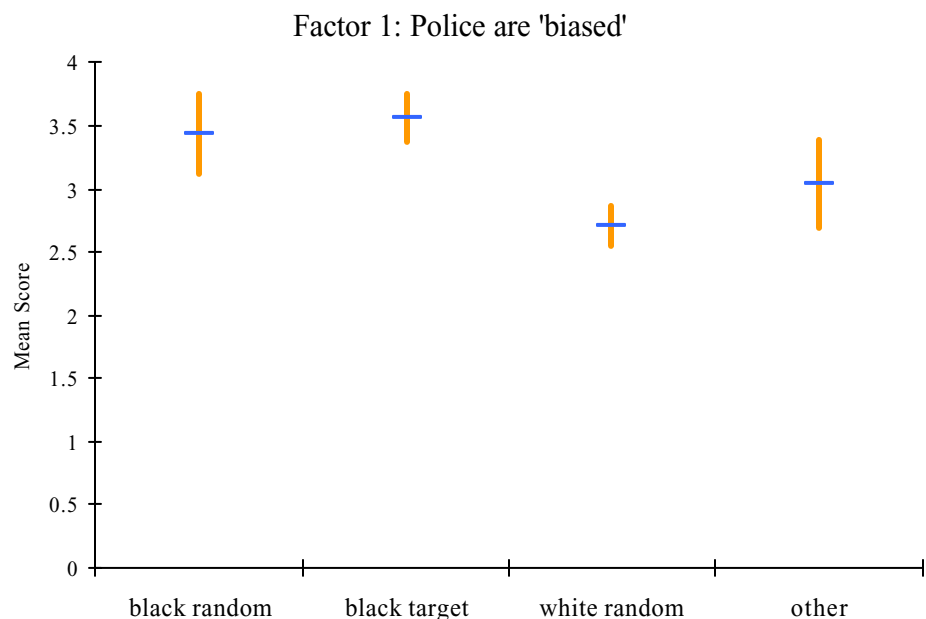
Significant differences were found [F = 16.9, p > .001]   .

In this graph, the blue lines represent average scores, and the orange bars represent the range of scores for 95% of a particular group.
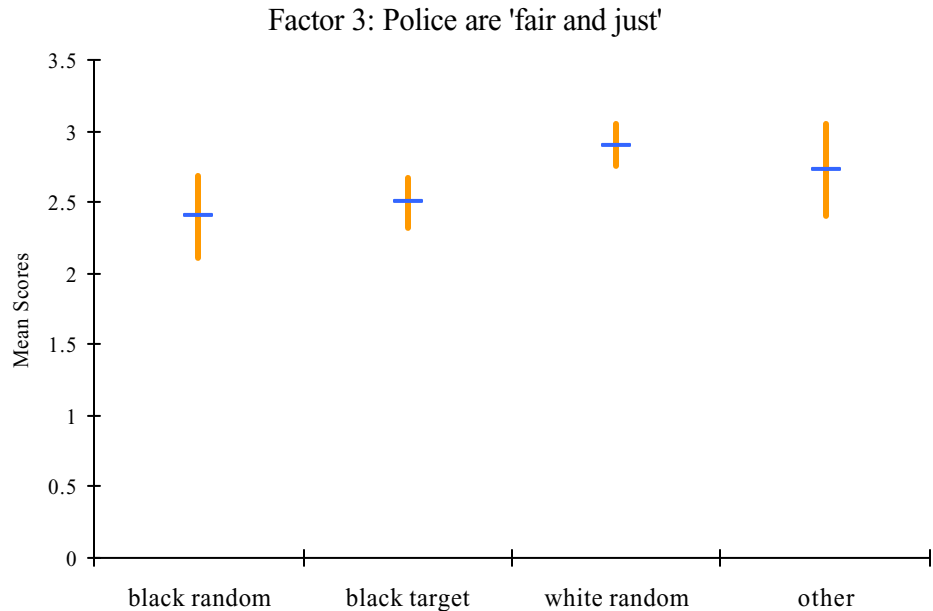
In the chart to the right, perceptions that police are 'just doing a job' differ substantially across the four racial groups. Again, 95% of all persons in both black groups score, in this case, lower on this perception regarding police bias than 95% of all white respondents.

Factor 2: Police 'just doing a job'

Significant differences were found [F = 12.0, p > .001]   .

In this graph, the blue lines represent average scores, and the orange bars represent the range of scores for 95% of a particular group.

In the chart to the right, perceptions that police are 'fair and just' differ significantly across the four racial groups. Yet again, 95% of <u>all</u> persons in both black groups score higher on this perception regarding police bias than 95% of <u>all</u> white respondents.

Factor 3: Police are 'fair and just'

Significant differences were found [F = 5.4, p > .001]   .

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In this graph, the blue lines represent average scores, and the orange bars represent the range of scores for 95% of a particular group.

In the chart to the right, perceptions that citizens should support 'good' police show little difference between groups. There are no significant differences between these groups.

Factor 4: Support 'good' police
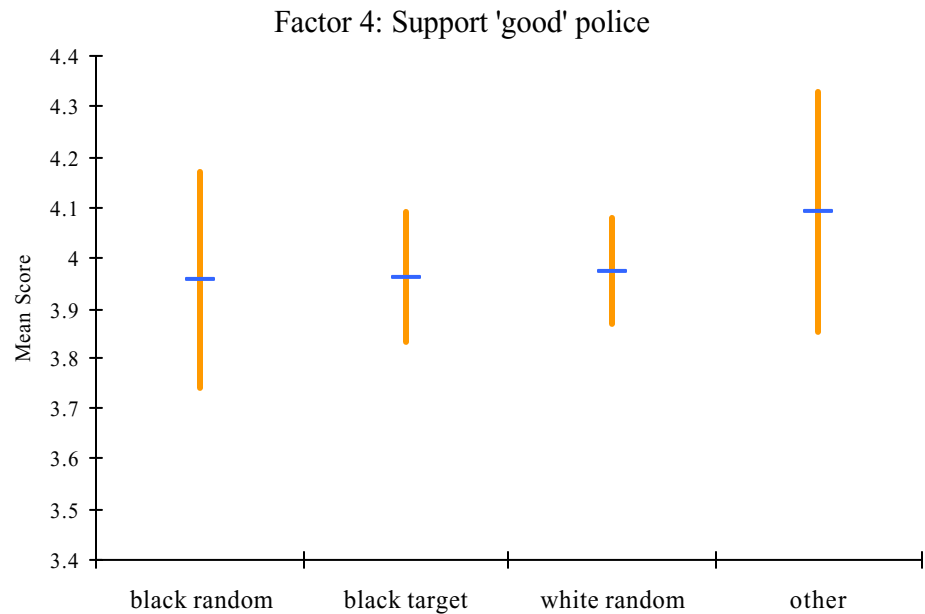
Significant differences were found [F = .33, ns]   .

Together, these results demonstrate a dramatic difference between the four groups studied. Most dramatically, the magnitude of the differences can be shown by realizing that 95% of respondents in both black groups differ from 95% of all respondents in the white group on three of the four perceptions measures. This result demonstrates a huge difference in the way Nashville Police are perceived by Black and White residents.

Recommendations:

Results from this study show that residents' perceptions of the Nashville Police differ significantly, and to a substantial magnitude, based on the race of respondents. This result can be viewed through numerous lenses, but from a public relations perspective, the Metro Nashville Police Department is confronting a substantial racial gulf in its public perception. The strong sampling methodology and the inclusion of control variables adds to the confidence of this conclusion – there are not compelling rival explanations to

these data. Finally, it is important to note the difference between the two Black samples included in the study. One group, Blacks randomly selected from throughout Nashville, are similar to the second group, Blacks randomly selected from the area of Nashville with the highest number of traffic stops. However, Blacks sampled from the high traffic stop area have greater mistrust of the police and stronger perceptions of bias. As shown in the graph, Blacks from the targeted area have a small range of variability in their scores; that is, Black respondents from the high traffic stop area of Nashville are very consistent in their negative perceptions of police. These data point to strong differences in the way that Nashville citizens perceive the police department based on their race.

The findings suggest that educating both officers and residents regarding citizen's perceptions and police practices is essential. It is critical that Nashville Police Department trains officers and establishes a culture that values quality and effective community partnerships and services over the number of arrests. Ronald Davis, Region Vice President of NOBLE indicates that agencies that establish a culture primarily focused on crime reduction are more likely to experience bias-based policing and increases in officer misconduct. He continues by stating that the end result is an attitude to reduce crime by "any means necessary" and in many cases, target people based on race, biases and stereotypes. Nashville Police may not be practicing bias-based policing however, the perception of Blacks who reside in this city is that Nashville Police are biased. Nashville Blacks may not perceive that the police are attempting to protect and serve in their neighborhood, but reducing crime in a bias way. It is imperative that the residents are educated as to police practices and be informed of the efforts to respond to their needs and call for service. Also, it is important that officers are educated in effective community policing practices, are culturally competent and effectively disengage from traffic stops.